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AUTHOR Behn, Ruth; Hamer, Lois V.
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ABSTRACT

Designed as informational aids for community college practitioners, these two booklets examine the counseling and job placement needs of older adult students. The first booklet addresses itself to community college counselors. After profiling the composition of the older adult population in terms of "young-old" persons (those of 55 to 75 years old) and "old-old" persons (those 75 years or older), this booklet examines 14 false stereotypes concerning the intelligence, educational interests, personal goals, and physiology of older adults. The remainder of the booklet discusses the role of the counselor in providing academic and personal counseling to older adults; planning teaching and testing methods appropriate to their needs; managing group counseling sessions; and increasing general awareness of the educational and training needs of today's older adult. The second booklet, which is addressed to college placement officers, first notes the stereotypes that have kept older adults from successfully competing in the job market and then examines: (1) benefits to employers of hiring older workers; (2) the social and financial benefits derived by older adults from employment; (3) the unique ability of the community college to meet the training needs of older adults; (4) ways in which a college employment center can serve older adults; (5) volunteer work options for older adults; and (6) other employment resources. (JP)

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[and]

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A Guide for Community College Placement Officers

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LOS ANGELES VALLEY COLLEGE

Alice J. Thurston, Ph.D., President
Lois Lewis, Assistant Dean of Community Outreach Education
Lois V. Hamer, Project Manager, Senior Adult Program
Ruth Behn, Counselor, Author
Ruth F. Towbin, Editor
Dean Detrick, Illustrator

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Jeanne Aronson, Director

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TALL TALES
About Older Americans

"It is always in season for
old men to learn."
–Aeschylus

CONTENTS

Introduction
The Many Roles of the Counselor of Older Adults:
- Counselor as Untwister of Tangled Tales
- Counselor as Educational Advisor
- Counselor as Vocational Advisor
- Counselor as Personal/Social Advisor
- Counselor as Teacher
- Counselor as Group Leader
- Counselor as Planner

INTRODUCTION

A Counseling Story for Today

"What if you were in a boat with your child, your wife, and your mother. A storm came up and the boat was sinking. As the only strong swimmer, you could save yourself and one of the others. Whom would you choose?"

The American, with some hesitation, said that he would save the child. The East Indian, without hesitation, said, "I would save my mother. I can have only one mother!"

The hesitation of the American was in trying to decide between wife and child. Or, he may have been trying desperately to think of some scheme to save all three.

In the United States, education has traditionally given the young its highest priority. Second in line are the middle-aged. The older adult, represented in the allegory by the mother, has, until recently, been neglected by educators and counselors.

Reasons advanced were, "Older people are serene." "They are content, or even disinterested." "They are not motivated." Or, instructors may have said, "Older students are inflexible. They are unable to learn anything new." Current research has shown that these notions are as outdated as the horse and carriage.

Just Who Are the Old?

In the 1930's the numerical ages 60 and 65 were arbitrarily picked for retirement eligibility from work. After reaching that magic three-score years one automatically became "old." Fifty years later, we need a new picture of the "old American."

Indeed, grandmother often dresses like her daughter. She may be planning a second career, another marriage, or a new commitment as a volunteer. "Old" has become a "weasel word", which defines nothing or nobody.

A more useful classification has been offered by Bernice Neugarten, one of the nation's leading gerontologists. She places the "young-old" in between ages 55 to 75. Those 75 and over are considered "old-old", and very few of these are seen in colleges. Now what roles must counselors assume in order to help those persons who are 55 and older?

THE MANY ROLES OF THE COUNSELOR OF OLDER ADULTS

Counselor as Untwister of Tangled Tales

These time-worn stereotypes are presented for consideration:

Older people:

in Tale 1:

Have no interest in going back to school.

Wrong! Where outreach programs were initiated and courses made available to them, older persons have flocked to community college classes. The chief barriers to their participation have been (1) lack of information, money or transportation, or (2) feeling inadequate in the classroom, or (3) thinking that students are always young. Lack of interest has never been a problem.

in Tale 2:

Have declining intelligence.

Wrong! Older adults show no decline in intelligence, although some current types of IQ testing may favor young students, who are "test-wise." A lifetime of experience can help one to compensate.

in Tale 3:

Have difficulty in learning new things.

Not true! Verbal and other skills can even improve with age. The problem is more one of motivation to learn, rather than ability.

in Tale 4:

Are inflexible and "set in their ways."

Actually, older persons are often tired of a lifetime of drastic changes--depressions, wars and other crises. They *choose* to live in a more routine fashion. There are abundant examples of very flexible old people: Winston Churchill, Grandma Moses, Ben Franklin, George Burns, Maggie Kuhn and Ruth Towbin!

in Tale 5:

Are usually depressed.

The fact is, depression can affect all ages. Witness the high suicide rate of the young. The old often have multiple losses, thus would seem to have more reasons to be depressed. Neither group has an option on depression.

in Tale 6:

Want to take only arts and crafts or fun courses.

There is a decided difference between persons attracted to senior recreation centers and those who come to community

colleges, particularly in levels of education and motivation to complete schooling interrupted in earlier life. However, long lectures, long assignments, plus traditional examinations may "turn off" the excitement of learning for the older student.

in Tale 7:

Want to live with their kids or be dependent.

Figures show that 80 percent of older adults are self-sufficient and mobile. Intergenerational ties continue to be strong despite other upheavals in family life. Fewer than 5 percent of older adults are in nursing homes or other institutions.

in Tale 8:

Have no interest in sex.

There may indeed be gradual slowing of response, but new research has shown that sexual activity (and problems) persist into old-old age.

in Tale 9:

Are often frail.

Vigor and strength can last throughout life. If vigor has declined, it can be regained through proper exercise. Older persons have fewer illnesses and fewer psychosomatic problems than younger persons. Over 90 percent of those over 65 are mobile.

in Tale 10:

Are likely to "go down hill" after retirement.

Attitudes toward retirement vary widely. Many workers in routine jobs can hardly wait to retire. Most take up avocations, travel or begin new jobs. The average life expectancy after retirement at 65 for men is 14 years. Women have 18 years of life expectancy after 65. The best years of life can be the retirement years.

in Tale 11:

Want to be with others their own age.

Most of the world lives with many generations under one roof. Only Americans think it's great that grandparents live alone or in Sun City. In the United States, rather than flocking together in large numbers, older persons are actually dispersed throughout communities.

in Tale 12:

Tend to become senile toward the end of life.

Senility is *not* inevitable, and when present is due to disorders or disease, *not to age.*

in Tale 13:

Are very much alike.

The "young-old" actually show a wider range of individual differences than any other age group. They not only have the differences that they acquired genetically; they also have a lifetime of singular accumulated values and experiences.

There are very few universals. However, there can be: (1) Some decline in physical strength; (2) Loss of speed and reaction time in mental tasks, usually compensated for by skills and knowledge; (3) Some changes in eyesight and hearing; (4) More inclination to caution, which often masks ability.

in Tale 14:

Have very few interests.

E.K. Strong of Stanford tells us that those things which were liked at 25 years of age will be increasingly liked when one is older. His research shows no change in volume of interests. The older population does show decline of interest in physical activities and adventures.

So endeth these tales.

For some information on the older adult that is as factual as possible, consider the following:

The population aged 60 and over numbered 4.9 million in 1900; however, by the year 2000, the 60+ group is expected to be 42 million. From 1900 to 1975 the percentage of the older group in the population more than doubled. By 1990 it is estimated that the median number of school years completed by those 65 and over in this country will be 11.9 years. With earlier retirements forecast for the future, it is time for educators to give more attention and emphasis to the "top third of the lifetime."

1900

1975

Counselor as Educational Advisor

Senior adults have not been utilizing the skills of the counselor as an academic advisor for several reasons.

- At present, few Americans in the 55 to 75 age group feel the necessity for degrees and certification. Moreover, these would be futile acquisitions in a society which considers persons over 50 unemployable.
- Fewer than half of the persons now over 65 have a high school education; yet, according to noted gerontologist, James A. Peterson, all have "Certificates in Life," which attest to their competency.
- The hurdles of the educational race course have seemed too high for most.
- Courses for self-development and sociability can usually be selected with minimum counseling.

Beginning in the 1980's, the new group of the older population, better educated than the preceding one, will be demanding courses in the regular curriculum. They will be spurred on not only by technological unemployment, but by increased political and social involvements. The effects of inflation will also increase job-seeking.

Counselor as Vocational Advisor

Effective January 1, 1979, it became unlawful for an employer to force the retirement of a worker prior to age 70, without cause. Thus, it will become more necessary that counselors in community colleges become experts on second career education and choices, part-time occupations, and ways to help the older worker who has been replaced by a machine.

Workshops will be needed to assist the older person in the psychological and social aspects of retirement planning. (Such offerings in employment settings tend to emphasize financial and practical considerations at the expense of the personal.)

The possibilities that some volunteer positions may build toward paid employment can be stressed.

Counselor as Personal/Social Advisor

When advising the senior adult in the personal realm, community college counselors might be especially aware of their own feelings toward an older generation. Stereotypes should be thrown out, replaced by facts from research. Training might be sought on aging psychodynamics. The counselor needs to be

current on the social structure of the community. For example, it is important to know about such agencies as the American Association of Retired Persons, the Gray Panthers, and governmental programs.

Counselees can be helped:

- To attain positive self-awareness
- To adjust to changing family roles
- To adapt to physical changes
- To become involved in the life of the college
- To become involved in a cause beyond the self

Older persons are very sensitive to the counselor's serious and attentive listening. However, it should be noted that most older Americans are reluctant to seek help, because of lifetime self-sufficiency, and their conceptions (or misconceptions) about costs.

Counselor as Teacher

The following are tips for teachers:

- Older persons usually perform more effectively when time limits are not too stringent.
- Short sessions and short lessons will keep older adults coming back.
- Non-threatening types of tests should be used for those whose test-taking skills are rusty.
- Distractions should be kept to a minimum, whether from noise or conversations from several directions.
- Presenting information both visually and orally will help those with sight or hearing handicaps.
- Older adults will learn more effectively if material is found to be useful.
- Older students are more easily frustrated than younger students if deprived of success too often.
- Hard chairs in straight rows are uncomfortable to old bones!

Counselor as Group Leader

Gerontological counselors have learned that the older population is much more attracted to counseling offered in groups. Of course, not all older people make good group candidates.

Tips for group leaders:

- Age-integrated groups, dealing with the crises of the life cycle, work better than old-only groups, which concern themselves chiefly with family conflicts, illness and loneliness.
- For depression of older persons, group work is especially ideal.
- Use all of the personality theories and practices applicable to older adults, i. e. an eclectic approach.
- The defenses of illusion and denial should not be attacked too vigorously. Some are necessary in order to face losses of jobs, friends, community.
- Behavior modification can be used in handling unemployment questions of the aged by changing the goal statement. When "I can't get a job because I'm too old." is rephrased "At my age, what can I do to make myself employable?", the problem becomes treatable. Then potential and talents can be developed accordingly.
- Techniques which have been successfu are values tests, collages to foster Life Review, humorous tems or anecdotes, proverbs and lists of strengths.
- Groups for older persons not only are therapeutic but also are a valuable means of appeasing social hunger.

Goals for the elderly in groups can be:

- Gaining awareness of residual personal strengths
- Learning assertive techniques to deal with problems of everyday living
- Clarifying of values. Work on retaining one's own values in a changing world
- Increasing one's self-worth by refuting stereotypes
- Encouraging new personal relationships to replace old ones lost.

Counselor as Planner

In the past, the counselor has been concerned more with the personal than with the educational and vocational aspects of counseling the older student. The interests of those past 60 were thought to be simple as ABC--Amateur Art, Bingo and Coffee-Klatches.

Career plans for the thirty million Americans who will retire in the near future *must* be more challenging. This group will be better educated, in better health, and will demand better opportunities.

Experts predict that newer "life-stage" and developmental theories will aid the counselor-planner, replacing today's counseling for leisure.

Such non-traditional courses as communication skills for activists, pre-retirement planning, psychology of personality and aging, as well as non-credit courses of their own choice will introduce older students to college life.

Specifically, counselor-planners can:

- Entice one interested counselor with a reduced load in order to become a gerontology specialist
- Allow for the reticence of the older person by insuring that counseling will be done in a private place
- Alert staff that morning and early afternoon periods are more favorable for mature students
- Encourage staff self-assessment by means of a test on attitudes towards the older adult
- Advise staff that academic involvement is more important to this population than obtaining degrees
- Inform the counselors that the skills they already have from helping the young formulate plans, make decisions and adjust to life-crises can be easily adapted to gerontological counseling

The truth is that gerontological counseling can be seen as a special form of helping; the difference is chiefly in degree more than in kind.

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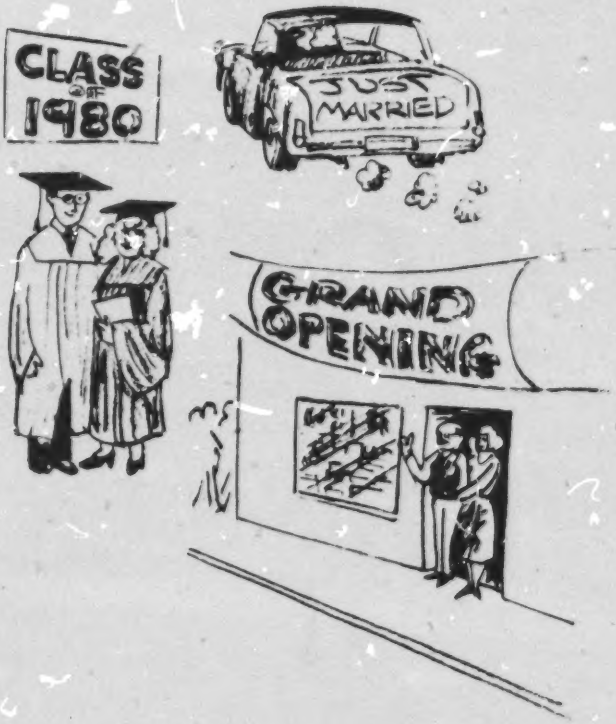
Thank You Counselor



Never Too Old To EARN

A Guide For Community College Placement Officers

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NEVER TOO OLD TO EARN
The Older Student and the Work Force

Forty is the old age of youth; fifty
is the youth of old age.
- Victor Hugo

CONTENTS

Introduction
Profile of the Older Student as Job Seeker
Benefits to the Employer of Older Workers
Benefits to the Older Student/Employee
The Contribution of the Community College
How the Employment Center Can Serve Older Students
Selective Volunteering as an Option
Other Employment Resources
Conclusion

Selected Bibliography

INTRODUCTION

When an Indian shaman, or wise man, is asked for guidance and advice, he will nod, shuffle about in a little dance, and give a mysterious roundabout reply. Although a direct solution to the problem is not offered, the searcher can return for additional clues until he is content. According to ancient Indian lore, the truth has four corners. The searcher must discover three of the corners for himself, while the shaman-teacher can give only one.

This bit of Indian wisdom is not only a model of a counseling strategy, it is appropriate for the employment officer who helps older adults. While older persons may need some assistance with one corner, the truth about employment opportunities in the later years, they will not be long in discovering the remaining corners for themselves. A wealth of lifetime experience and skills can be brought forth after they have been taught newer job search techniques and how to overcome stereotyping. When people are encouraged to say, "At my age, what can I do to become more employable?" rather than repeating the cliché, "I can't get a job because I'm too old," they become active problem-solvers instead of passive victims. Some may need only the latest labor market or educational information.

The following pages will give information which might be useful for placement officers to present to prospective employers or to the older adult himself.

PROFILE OF THE OLDER STUDENT AS JOB SEEKER

There is no magic number at which one suddenly becomes old, despite the widespread use of ages 60 to 65 as the entry into "senior citizenship." Aging is such an individual process that one is said to be "as old as one feels." Oliver Wendell Holmes put this even more succintly when he remarked, "To be seventy years young is sometimes far more cheerful and hopeful than to be forty years old."

Some flexible arrangements for step-by-step retirement or post-retirement would be: part-time jobs in lower levels of skill; work for temporary agencies; consulting or advisory roles; teaching one's specialty in the work place or school; Monday and Friday employment to relieve the absenteeism crunch in industry. Taking on a public relations position for one's company or leadership and service in retiree clubs may be appealing to many of those who are retired.

Attractive alternatives to full-time work for older persons are job-sharing, flex-time, longer vacation periods and sabbaticals.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

The inducements which the community college offers to older adults are many.

First and foremost, it has a broad community base and long experience with teaching adults of all ages. The atmosphere is less formal. The faculty is friendly and outgoing.

The number of practical courses offered are a veritable smorgasbord for the educational taster or gourmand. There are well-established connections between the college and employers.

Special training programs coordinate with the immediate needs of industry. Training is often short-term and cost-free to the employer and the student.

Other advantages the community college offers are the emphasis on retraining for second and third occupations, job counseling and testing, and part-time job listings. Flexible, part-time temporary work has long been the norm for students.

The three major difficulties for older adults: lack of saleable job skills, lack of job-seeking expertise, and shaky self-confidence, can all be overcome in the community college at costs they can afford.

HOW THE EMPLOYMENT CENTER CAN SERVE THE OLDER STUDENTS

- Placement service matching experienced and inexperienced job seekers with appropriate employers.
- Resource center for labor market information.
- Training center for peer counselors who can help older students with self-esteem.
- Operation of a Senior Employment Center.
- Advocate for the older worker, offering facts to replace myths.

There should be only one "career" per person, to make room for younger people.

Careers involve more than jobs. Theorist Donald E. Super has defined career as a series of work-related positions occupied by a person over the course of his life. Thus, a career comprises being a student, a trainee, a job-holder, and even being a retiree.

Because there are millions of positions unfilled every year due to technological displacement, there is no reason to exclude the person over 55 on the basis of age prejudice alone. It is interesting that average persons change jobs from six to twelve times over a lifetime!

Stereotypes become embedded in "what's so" about an age group, but social scientists are now refuting myths with facts. Practices in the work place have been slow to catch up with new knowledge and trends, chiefly because there were so many well-trained and better-educated younger people available. So much for stereotypes.

BENEFITS TO THE EMPLOYER OF OLDER WORKERS

While there has been a large pool of young persons seeking jobs, they have been lacking in three important qualifications which the geritol set has in abundance: experience, mature judgment, and loyalty to the employer.

In addition, the older employee:

- Is absent less and changes jobs less often;
- Performs as well as or better than a younger person;
- Is not as apt to be distracted by his social life;
- Needs less supervision;
- Has steady consistency which can make up for short bursts of speed and fast reactions ("The Tortoise and the Hare" fable is a good analogy);

- Has physical strength to equal his lifetime maximum up to age 60. Automation is changing the strength requirements of many jobs, so this need not always be a factor in the decision to retain a worker; also, jobs can be altered to fit the older individual;
- Becomes more valuable when minor accommodations are made in retraining programs;
- Will be more likely to assume responsibility;
- Exercises greater care with equipment and is less wasteful of materials.

Some additional tips for recalcitrant employers are:

- Statistically, the average job tenure was 3.6 years in 1978 for full-time employees. This low figure would be due chiefly to a high turnover rate of the young worker, as older persons tend to stay on the job longer.

- Employers must realize that they have nearly doubled their costs when older, still productive workers are pensioned off. Younger employees will be going through expensive probationary training at the same time that the retirees are being paid.
- Tests which are normed on younger persons may prove inappropriate for older prospective workers. Test-taking skills may be rusty, or instructions may not be understood due to a hearing impairment.
- Although this does not invariably lead to friction, there can be potential problems when older workers are directed by young supervisors.
- There is no valid way to measure work performance at any age; therefore, employees nearing retirement age should not be penalized for stereotyped thinking about age and lowered productivity.
- Mature workers have higher morale, are more reliable, and can benefit from retraining because they transfer learning from earlier experiences.

BENEFITS TO THE OLDER STUDENT/EMPLOYEE

There are many reasons why older adults will want and need to work:

Increased longevity and change in the mandatory retirement laws: With the longer lifespan, years of unemployment and idleness may not be as appealing to the retiree as anticipated.

Financial pressures: Inflationary pressures on retirement incomes show no indication of letting up in the future. Older women, as a particular example, often must work past traditional retirement age, because of entering the work force at a later age and at lower rates of pay.

Possible changes in Social Security earnings test: Under current laws a person may continue to draw on Social Security while earning up to $5,000. Over that, $1.00 in benefits is forfeited for each $2.00 earned. There is pressure to have the government change this in the 1980's.

Contact with others: Changes in the structure of the family, plus geographical isolation, make the work place a good location for friendships.

Good health and the desire to be active: Good health in the later years has been made possible through modern health practices, with the likelihood of continued good physical condition into old-old age.

Need to feel productive: Persons who have spent most of their lives working may find that leisure, alternating with work, is a more satisfactory pattern.

Opportunities to exercise leadership and creativity: These are invaluable resources that society cannot afford to waste.

Chance to maintain status, dignity, self-determination.

Long-awaited choices of hours, types of work and locations.

A modern view of old age as a continuum instead of a separate stage of life is advocated by gerontologist Bernice Neugarten. She classifies persons aged 55 to 75 as the "young-old," a more transitional term. At about age 75, one may become "old-old," but not necessarily so. While the major stereotype is that one becomes "old" at 60, there are other myths in need of debunking. Some are described here:

The young-old are inflexible and can't learn new things.

Researchers finally have discovered what sages always knew--that older adults can learn as well as younger ones, but may not be as motivated unless the material is practical and of use to them. In the workplace, as older workers saw themselves passed by for training time and again, they bought the tales about old dogs and new tricks. Prejudices of employers in favor of the young and middle-aged help keep this stereotype alive.

The young-old have a declining intellect.

Intellectual functioning can be the same or even higher between the ages of 45 to 80 as it was between 25 to 44. IQ testing, which is a different matter, may be biased against those not accustomed to taking tests. Moreover, testing can never measure the assets of experience, motivation, and potential to solve problems.

Older adults are in poor health.

The greater number, about 85 percent, are healthy and have good attendance records, in comparison with workers of younger ages. Although some have a physical impairment that may limit hours or working conditions, most have vigor and strength to produce well.

Retirees want only entertainment, not vocational courses.

Future retirees with high school diplomas will be more at home in challenging courses than previous groups. (In the years 1970 to 1990, persons 65 years old will have jumped from 8.7 median number of school years completed to 11.9 years completed.)

Furthermore, with mandatory retirement age advanced to age 70, it will become increasingly necessary for an employee to update skills or retrain for a second or third occupation. In the past, there was no room in the labor force for older retrained persons. Soon the labor market will not be able to function without them.

Older persons just want to sit in the sun with others their own age.

Diversity is the hallmark of old age; the longer you live, the more individual you become, considering both genetic endowments and singular life experiences. The old "birds of a feather" doesn't fit, as these birds come in many kinds of plumage!

When older persons are together in groups, they are in active organizations such as Gray Panthers, American Association of Retired Persons, Retired Teachers Association, and Senior Corps of Retired Executives. Older people have been enthusiastic participants when programs in community colleges are designed for their needs and have been publicized widely.

When polled, 25 percent of retirees in one study said they wished that they had not retired from full-time work; another 25 percent wished to do meaningful volunteer work.

- Job development.
- Referral to or provision of job-seeking courses or workshops. Appropriate courses range from assertion training, civil service exam preparation, and self-exploration, to resumé preparation.
- Referral to other employment services in the community which specialize in mature workers; i.e. CETA-funded programs.
- Coordinator of work-study programs which will admit older students for training/retraining.

SELECTIVE VOLUNTEERING AS AN OPTION

For those who have become disinterested in or discouraged with the job search, volunteering can fill several needs. Anecdotes abound in which companies and agencies have tapped talented, trained volunteers for paid jobs. As this does not always happen without some planning on the part of the worker, it is wise to survey the hiring policies of an organization. Popular manuals, such as What Color is Your Parachute (Bolles) and Sweaty Palms (Medley) offer job-search techniques which would be useful in selecting a promising volunteer site.

Volunteer opportunities for senior persons are myriad. The government sponsors the Peace Corps, VISTA, and the Retired Senior Volunteer Programs. There are more than 200 chapters of the Senior Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE), in which retired executives advise those who want to operate a small business. Several of these chapters are located in community colleges. Senior Companion Program, under the Community Action Program, gives older persons a chance to help others remain in their homes living semi-independently.

Community colleges use assistants in older adult programs, emeritus colleges, drama groups, women's centers, and in countless other capacities.

Meals for the Homebound and Friendly Visitors Programs are examples of local kinds of opportunities for service. Volunteer agencies list hundreds more.

If stipends for "out of pocket" expenses are offered, older people can afford to become involved. In 1974, 22 percent of citizens 65 and over were volunteers.

OTHER EMPLOYMENT RESOURCES

Voluntary Non-Profit Agencies for Senior Adults.

Some are funded by state Area Agencies on Aging, while others are Community Chest or United Way organizations.

State Employment Services. While there is currently little funding for Senior Employment Specialists in the state offices, the emphasis and amount of legislation in Congress for the aged would bode for increases in future funding at the state level.

Private Employment Agencies. Mature Temps, Inc. is an example of a special placement service for older persons desiring temporary employment. While there is a fee, sometimes it is paid by the employer.

Specialized agencies can be found through directories or in newspaper classified sections.

Federally Funded Programs. Examples are: Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) and Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA).

CONCLUSION

Placement specialists in community colleges are familiar with entry-level jobs, local employment trends, and referral agencies for young persons, but rarely are they aware of the American Association of Retired Persons or possibilities for employment of the individual 55 and over. They will need vocational, educational, and social information for this new population. Senior students will be knocking at the doors of the colleges in the 1980's!

Educators are talking about new life patterns during which education and work are alternated throughout life. In the future, one may retire early, return to education and/or work, and then retire again. Linear career ladders will be replaced by spiral career ladders. "Future shock" can then be circumvented.

I.F. Stone, former publisher of I.F. Stones' Weekly, a Washington newsletter, was asked the secret of being happily retired. He replied, "Be mad enough to embark on a whole new career. Prepare for retirement with a project about which you're passionate, but which you couldn't pursue in your previous harried existence." His philosophy can be inspiration for all older adults.

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